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Central Intelligence Agency  
National Foreign Assessment Center

4 December 1979

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Status of the Iraqi Armed Forces

*Iraq has a clear military edge over Iran because of the turmoil in the Iranian armed forces. If the Iraqis decide to launch a full-scale attack, Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan province is the most likely target.*

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*Iraq's armed forces have not assumed a threatening posture towards Iran. Some border guard units are on alert, but all major Iraqi armored units are in their normal garrisons. If the orders are given, the forces could be in position to launch a full-scale attack within three to four days.*

Ground Forces. The Iraqi Army numbers some 200,000 men, about one-third more than Iran's half-strength army. Army units recently completed two months of field maneuvers and probably are at peak combat effectiveness. The army is equipped with the latest Soviet weaponry although the recent maneuvers undoubtedly caused some wear on the equipment.

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Iraq maintains 50,000 police, border guard, and reserve units, generally in Kurdish areas along the border. The Iraqi regime also controls the People's Army, a militia of about 125,000 men.

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*This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Strategic Research for the Iran Task Force. Questions or comments may be addressed to Chief, Iran Task Force on*

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Air Force. The Air Force has almost 25 percent more aircraft than Iran's 460 combat aircraft and probably double the number of operational aircraft. The new Soviet-supplied MIG-23s and SU-20/22s have greatly improved the range and payload capabilities of the Air Force. [REDACTED]

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The Air Force is also limited by a lack of newer air-to-air missiles and precision-guided munitions. [REDACTED]

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The Iraqi Air Force controls the largest helicopter force in the Arab world. They are proficient in heliborne operations and helicopters have been used extensively in Kurdish areas. [REDACTED]

Air Defense. The Air Defense Command incorporates surface-to-air missiles and antiaircraft guns. The bulk of the SAMs are placed to defend Baghdad or Persian Gulf oil fields and ports. The antiaircraft guns defend most major civilian and military facilities, including airfields. The Iraqi radar system provides coverage at 6,000 meters over the northern 275 kilometers of the Persian Gulf. [REDACTED]

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Navy. Iraq's small Navy is the least effective of its armed forces. [REDACTED] has conducted only two live surface-to-surface missile firings from its twelve missile boats and spends most of its time in port. [REDACTED]

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Capabilities Against Iran. Iraq has a clear military edge over Iran because of the turmoil in the Iranian armed forces. Before the revolution, the two sides were about equal, but Iraq now has a two-to-one advantage over Iran in operational combat aircraft and has widened its advantage in armored forces. Iran still retains the ability to close the Persian Gulf to Iraqi shipping and to severely damage Iraqi oil facilities. [REDACTED]

Iraq's military options for a full-scale attack are limited by terrain to the southern third of its border with Iran. The mountains along the northern two-thirds of the border generally favor an Iranian defense and access by road is limited. Parts of the area are also inhabited by Kurds hostile to both governments and neither country has important military or economic installations close to the border. [REDACTED]

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The terrain along the southern third of the border permits large-scale offensive operations except in the spring when flooding presents a significant obstacle. Vital Iranian military

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[REDACTED] 25X1

and economic installations in Khuzestan are relatively close to the border and the population is largely Arab--hostile to the Iranian Government and engaged in guerrilla activity. Iraqi intervention could be based on the pretext of defending the Arab population from Iranian efforts to suppress dissent. [REDACTED] 25X1

A full-scale Iraqi attack on Iran's Khuzestan province is likely to be successful. The two Iraqi mechanized divisions stationed south of Baghdad could launch an attack on the single Iranian armored division defending Khuzestan with little or no warning. More likely, however, Iraq would expand its southern force to include two reinforced armored divisions from Baghdad and Tikrit, achieving a greater than four-to-one advantage in men and equipment. [REDACTED] 25X1

These two reinforced armored divisions could be in position within three or four days of receiving orders. Some combat aircraft and amphibious equipment also might be moved from the Baghdad area to bases in the south. The Iranian Armed Forces are in such turmoil that they probably could not react quickly enough to provide significant armor reinforcements to the armored division defending Khuzestan. [REDACTED] 25X1 25X1C 25X1

The loyalty of its Shia troops would be a major uncertainty for Baghdad in any military confrontation with Iran. [REDACTED] 25X1

[REDACTED] A further complication for Baghdad is that any attack against Iranian Khuzestan would have to be launched from Iraq's largely Shia-populated southern provinces. Moreover, such an attack probably would unite all Iranians behind Khomeini and Iranian forces are likely to put up fierce resistance. [REDACTED] 25X1

[REDACTED] 25X1

[REDACTED] 25X1

Iraqi Armed Forces

Army	
Personnel	200,000
Tanks	
T-72	150
T-62	1,300
T-54/55	1,050
T-34	50
APCs	2,600
Artillery over 100mm	1,100
FROG launchers	24
SCUD launchers	11
 Navy	
Personnel	4,500
Missile boats	12
Minesweepers	5
Landing ships	4
 Air Force	
Personnel	17,000
Bombers	
TU-22	14
TU-16	7
Fighter aircraft	
MIG-23	82
MIG-21	270
MIG-19	10
MIG-15/17	35
Hawker Hunter	15
SU-20/22	90
SU-7	52
Transport aircraft	
IL-76	8
AN-12	10
AN-24/26	11
AN-2	11
Boeing 707/727/737/747	3/3/3/2 (all civilian)

## Helicopters

## Attack

MI-24 HIND

51

SA-342 Gazelle

42

## Transport

224

## Utility

54

## Air Defense

## Personnel

21,000

## SAM launchers

SA-2

80

SA-3

78

SA-6

105

SA-7

Numerous

SA-9

31

## Air Defense Artillery

ZSU-57/2

34

ZSU-23/4

34

M 53/70

50

Towed AAA

2,350

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